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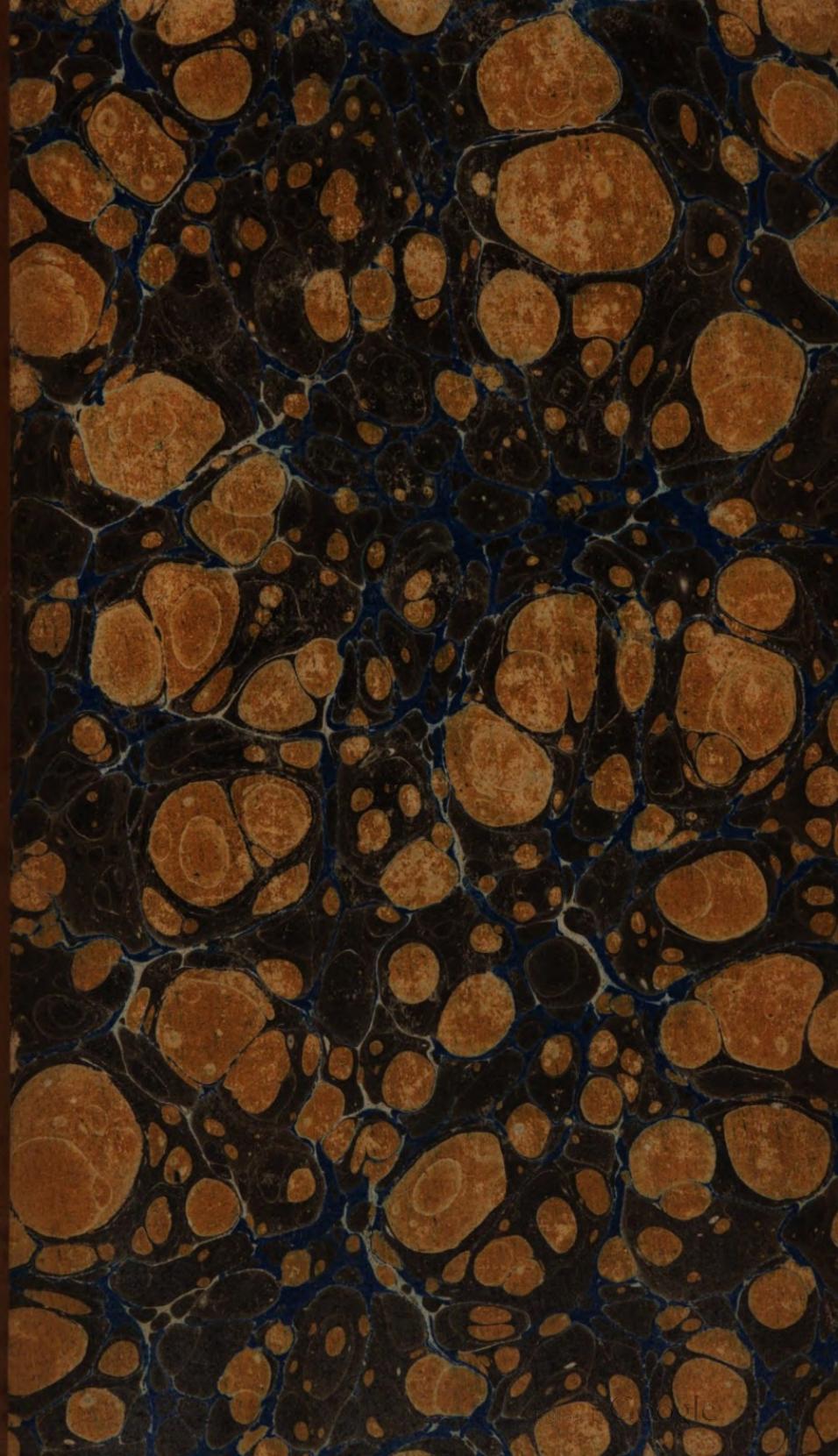
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FUNERAL ORATION

FUNERAL ORATION

DELIVERED

AT THE SOLEMN OBSEQUIES

OF THE LADY

GWENDALINE TALBOT

PRINCESS BORGHESE

IN THE CHURCH

OF S. CHARLES IN THE CORSO

ON THE 23RD OF DECEMBER, MDCCCXL

BY

C. M. BAGGS D.D.



ROME

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1841.

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
JOHN, EARL OF SHREWSBURY
WATERFORD AND WEXFORD

&c. &c. &c.

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE
IS DEDICATED
AS A TRIBUTE OF SYMPATHY
AND A THEME OF CONSOLATION
BY THE AUTHOR.

English College, Rome
Jan. 1. 1841.

Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: the woman that feareth the Lord,
she shall be praised. *Prov. xxxi. 30.*

Ages have passed away, my Christian Brethren, since the rulers of this city used to issue from its gates, at the head of well-tried veterans, and advance to distant countries to diffuse the fame, and to extend the empire of all-subduing Rome. They were accompanied in their onward march by war, famine and pestilence, furies who revel in the woes, and thirst for the blood, of man. The wealthy were despoiled; both rich and poor were massacred; widows and orphans and captives wept in vain, for pity was stifled in the breast of the Roman, while he was intent on the glory of his country. The Roman arms were every where successful: and if the fortunate general advanced the limits of the empire by

the conquest of some new territory, the senate assembled in the temple of the Goddess of war, and decreed that he should enjoy the honours of a triumph. Their sentence was ratified by popular acclamation—but who shall describe the splendours of a Roman triumph, one of the three things which the great Augustine desired to behold? Imperial Rome, the mistress of the world, poured forth her choicest treasures to welcome her returning champion; and he was already rich with the spoils of conquered nations. *There* were displayed in succession the arms, the chariots, the vessels of gold and silver, the diadems, the purple garments studded with gems, which he had taken from the enemy; and those rich crowns, which he had received as the rewards of valour. Magistrates, and priests with victims doomed for sacrifice, the senate, and the victorious army decked with laurels and wearing the crowns allotted to their merits, walked in the gorgeous procession, and sang the glories of the conqueror. The streets, the circus, the forum and the capitol were

thronged with Roman citizens attired in festal robes, who greeted their Emperor with praise and joyous acclamations. Music and choicest odours announced his approach : he was enthroned in a golden chariot drawn by four snow-white horses; and lest the splendour of his coming should exalt him in thought to an equality with Jove himself, there was behind him in the chariot one, who ever and anon admonished him that he was a mortal man.

Yet were there many, who moved in that brilliant pageant, who mourned and wept amid the common joy; their hands were bound behind them, their eyes were fixed upon the ground. They were the captives of the war; and foremost among them appeared their king, his wives and daughters, who knew no consolation, save that afforded by a Roman appointed to insult them. Then as the conqueror passed on through the forum, he ordered the fallen chiefs to be massacred in the Tullian prison: their naked corpses were dragged with hooks to the steps of moans, (as

they were emphatically called), and having been exposed in the forum to the gaze and insults of a relentless populace , those mangled remains of heroes and of potentates were cast into the Tiber. Meantime the exulting emperor ascended to the Capitol; and when the murder of his enemies had been announced to him , he offered sacrifice , and returned thanks to the tyrannical and lascivious God who there presided.

O what a change has Christ's religion wrought in this Eternal City! How different are the maxims which she has learnt from Peter and Paul, from those which the founders of her temporal power instilled into her!

Two months have not yet elapsed since a new triumph was displayed in Rome. It required not a decree of those who inherit the Roman purple: it was the effect of universal love and sympathy. *There* were no spoils of conquered nations; there no sculptured arches to immortalize their woes; there no parade of magistrates or soldiers. No music or perfumes were there; there was no emperor

in a gilded car. It was a mournful, but it was a lovely spectacle for men and angels, yes for God Himself, to gaze upon. It was at night: the Roman people thronged the streets to behold the solemn scene: they poured forth praises and benediction, and they offered garlands of flowers, as civic crowns, to her, who had saved the lives of many of their fellow-citizens, not indeed in war, but by the power of charity. *There* were the sighs of orphans and of widows; but they were sighs of sympathy, they were tears for the loss of her who triumphed. She needed no one to remind her of her mortality; her pure spirit had already departed to a happier world; her lifeless body was borne in triumph; and they, whose ancestors had subdued the world, the natives of that city, which rules the Christian Church, thought it an honour to yoke themselves to the car, which bore her earthly remains to their place of rest, the temple of the true and living God, in which the Virgin-Mother of His Son is honoured.

To the praise of a generous nation be it

said, she was followed to the tomb by thousands of the poor, with whom the rich vied in offering tokens of respect: and even the Sovereign Pontiff, the exalted ruler of two hundred millions of Christians, thought it became his sacred character to witness the affecting spectacle: He imparted his last benediction to the deceased, and declared her death to be a public calamity. Yet she was a native of an island, considered of old by the Romans as secluded from the rest of the world, remote Britain, whence they dragged the native Chieftain to grace the pomp of their triumphant emperor. Hers was a Roman triumph, but one of Christian Rome; a triumph not of pride, of ambition and of carnage, but one of virtue, of innocence and love.

The Romans, with a piety worthy of the holy city, have offered up prayers and supplications to God in many churches, for the admission to eternal bliss of the soul of the Princess Gwendaline Borghese. It was then right and becoming that we also, who have reason to be proud that she belonged to our beloved

country, should assemble together to testify our respect for her memory, and to unite in the ancient, and “holy, and wholesome thought of praying for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins”— if sin can be supposed still to stain a soul so pure as hers whose loss we deplore.

But why, we may ask, have such special honours been paid to the memory of the Princess Gwendaline? Why have her praises been so often reechoed by Roman orators and poets? Was it on account of her ancient family, her illustrious descent? Was it because she belonged to a race of nobles who have sacrificed their interests to their consciences? or was it for the deeds of her progenitors, for instance, of the great and good earl of Shrewsbury, who, after many gallant achievements, died with his son, sword in hand, fighting for his country before the walls of Chatillon? Or perhaps it was, because she was allied with illustrious families of Italy and France, with Innocent X. and Alexander VII. and far more intimately with the Aldobrandini

and Borghese families, with Clement VIII. and Paul V. whose name is inscribed on the front of the Vatican basilica of St. Peter. Oh no! it was for none of these things; others before her had connexions not less illustrious; yet was their memory not revered like hers.

Was it then her wealth, her exalted station in society? was it her youth and beauty, her accomplishments, her graceful deportment and affability, which won the hearts of all, and made them lavish honours so abundantly on her? All these things she did indeed possess: but all would have been faint and dim, had not religion shone upon them. Go visit the silent vaults of the illustrious dead, and tell me, what is the value of all earthly splendour, unless sanctified and rendered eternal by virtue and religion. Go visit the sanctuary beneath which the body of the Princess Gwendoline reposes, and learn and treasure in your heart the sacred maxim; “Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity, but to love God and to serve Him alone”. — To think that she, who but a few days previously had been seen at the well-

known public festivities of October, so young, so beautiful, so wealthy, so exalted, full of health and joy, should thus soon be numbered with the dead, and that she should be quickly followed by those so dear to her, who were to all appearance destined to inherit one day the glories of her house! — “ Oh truly doth this life pass away like a shadow, and as a ship that passeth through the waves, whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found, nor the path of its keel in the waters.”

The Lady Gwendaline has been thus highly honoured on account of her surpassing virtue. What then was her virtue? Hers was not the masculine heroism of a *Jahel* or a *Judith*: hers was not the false virtue of a *Lucretia* or a *Boadicea*. In vain should we seek for virtue like unto hers among Greeks, Romans or Barbarians, unless they were blessed with the light of Christian faith. The Virgin Mary, mother of our God and Saviour, “ full of grace, and blessed among women,” was the first model of Christian matrons, and many of them have walked in her blessed footsteps. Many a

holy virgin, many a holy matron adorned the Anglo-Saxon church. We revere the memory of the Bathildes and of the Sexburges, of the Ethelburghes and the Edithas, as does the Roman church that of the Priscillas and Lucinas, or of such saints as B. Francesca Romana: even the Borghese family can boast of the sanctity of two other noble matrons long since deceased. The Catholic church can recount the virtues of many of her daughters resembling a Jane Frances Chantal, a Bridget of Sweden, a Margaret of Scotland, an Elizabeth of Hungary or Portugal. Like unto these and walking humbly in their footsteps, the Lady Gwendaline shone with a bright though a reflected light, which emanated from the great source of light and love.

What then were the virtues of the Princess Gwendaline? Such is the nature of genuine Christian excellence, that one virtue cannot exist alone; it must be associated with others. Who can truly love his neighbour, unless he love him for the love of God? and who can truly love God, unless he believe and hope in

Him, and observe all His divine commands? Many therefore were the gems which adorned the soul of the Lady Gwendaline; from them I shall select for hasty examination only three, whose lustre was especially brilliant, her faith, her humility, and her charity.

1st. then, she was endowed with lively faith, without which “it is impossible to please God.” Here is the secret, here is the source, the spring of all her virtues. Her noble parents, while they cultivated assiduously her intellectual faculties, avoided the rock on which so many of our countrymen allow their dearest children to be wrecked. They did not consider a literary education sufficient, unless religion directed and sanctified it. They taught her youthful soul to believe in God, to believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, and in all the truths which He came down from heaven to teach. These truths He has committed to the safe keeping of his church, promising to her His perpetual assistance, and commanding his disciples to hear her, even as they would hear Him. Under the

guidance of the Catholic church, the Lady Gwendaline enjoyed that consoling peace of mind, that freedom from doubt and uncertainty, which is granted to those who rest within her secure haven, while others are “tossed about, and carried to and fro by every wind of doctrine.”

Her faith taught her that virtue is a gift of God, that it is the fruit of the grace of Christ, and that grace is obtained by prayer and the worthy reception of the sacraments. Every day therefore, in the morning and the evening, did she offer up her fervent devotions to the throne of grace: and at other times, when her avocations would permit, she retired to a little oratory, which she had formed near her chamber, and prayed to her heavenly Father in secret. Hence it frequently happened, that when persons called on her, she was not to be found; she was conversing in private with God. Every week she humbly confessed the faults of which her conscience might accuse her, she grieved for having offended, however slightly, her heavenly Father,

and renewed her pious resolutions to love him more fervently in future: and then she fed upon the bread of Angels, she received the body and blood of her Redeemer, and, according to his promise, she lived in Him, and He in her. Often might she be seen assisting at the numerous exercises of devotion practised in this city, kneeling amid the crowd of adorers of Jesus Christ at the forty hours' prayer, accompanying the B. Sacrament to the houses of the sick, and preparing them for its reception, visiting the stational churches, or those in which the month of May is dedicated to the honour of the B. Virgin, towards whom she cherished a tender devotion. At such exercises, and particularly while she assisted at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and meditated on the great truths of religion, God poured his graces abundantly into her soul. Oh! Christian parents, great is your responsibility. If you wish your children to imitate the virtues of the Princess Gwendaline, let them be trained up to exercises of piety as she was. If they are deficient

in virtue, it is because they are wanting in faith and devotion.

2ndly. Humility is indeed necessary as the foundation of faith : for without it we cannot bow down our understandings to believe, on the authority of God, truths, which we cannot comprehend : but lively faith cherishes and nourishes humility, and makes it still more humble. Faith reveals to man the immensity of God, and His unbounded perfections: at the same time it convinces him of his own insignificance, of his origin from nothing, of his sinfulness, and of the uncertainty of his future lot. From such considerations the Princess Gwendaline learned the great truth, that man is as nothing in comparison with God. The advantages, which she possessed, she considered as gifts received from Him, and as she had received them, she did not glory in them, but gave all honour to Him. Her conversation and deportment were regulated by these maxims. She was most kind and affable even to her servants; they were all bathed in tears at the news of her death :

and who that knew her was not ? If at home and in society she preserved, with all humility, the dignity of her high station, in the obscure houses of the poor and the sick she exercised humility in a heroic degree. *There* was seen by God and His holy angels the beautiful and the wealthy Princess Borghese performing the lowest offices for the meanest of God's servants. She made their beds, she swept their rooms, she lighted their fires, she dressed and washed and combed the least cleanly among them. On one occasion having carried with her through the streets a gown for a very poor sick woman, named Rosa, whom she visited nearly every day, and finding it too long, after she had put it on her, the young Princess knelt down, and in that posture cut and hemmed it. Truly in Gwendaline was verified that saying of Pope Gregory the great “ Non Angli, sed Angeli forent, si essent Christiani.” They would not be English or Angles, but Angels, if they were Christians. The poor woman still weeps whenever she hears the name of the Princess mentioned ;

and from her bed of sickness addresses the chair on which her benefactress used to sit.

3rdly. Thus was charity entwined with humility in the heart of the youthful Princess. As the divine perfections are not opposed to one another, but are blended together and identified in the most perfect harmony, even so do Christian virtues unite in the hearts of the servants of God without opposition. They are indeed of different hues; they are refracted and separated by the different characters of men, and the various occurrences of life: but, like the solar rays, they cross not, they impede not one another, but are combined with perfect order, in one effulgent stream of light. The charity, which the Princess Gwen-daline exercised towards the poor, had its source and origin in her love of God. Him she had loved from her infancy. She loved Him affectionately, and she loved Him effectually. She sought to promote His glory, by encouraging the Society for the propagation of the faith. What celestial joy, what love of God was depicted on her countenance when, in her

last illness, having already lost the power of speech, it was announced to her that she was about to go into the house of the Lord! She had been always ready for the coming of Christ, according to His divine injunction.

The love of God had through life sanctified her domestic affections: she loved the Prince her husband, and their noble family, the more ardently and constantly, because to natural affection was superadded the purest motive of virtue, obedience to the will of God. She was a devoted and affectionate wife, a tender and solicitous mother.

After she had fulfilled all the duties of her exalted station, what time remained was dedicated to the service of the poor. Not content with providing them with bedding and clothing, she herself used to select and purchase both; her charity was not satisfied with sending them food and medicines, she herself must be the bearer of them. With her own hands she would prepare a peculiar balsam, of which she possessed the secret, for healing sores and wounds; to the poor she distributed it

gratuitously; and the receipts of what was sold she devoted to their service. Alone and on foot, she used to repair to the wretched houses of the sick and indigent, that her benevolence might be concealed from men; and often was this angelic victim of charity seen endeavouring to shelter her delicate frame from the rain: she had been engaged in the business of her heavenly Father. All hours, she said, were good for deeds of benevolence. She was one of the sisters of charity in her parish, and such was her love of those committed to her care, that if in the summer months she returned from her country-residence for a few short hours to Rome, her first visit was paid to her beloved poor and sick. She founded in Rome extensive schools for the instruction of boys; and poor girls neglected by their parents she placed in asylums, and paid their expences. She cooperated in the foundation of the Savings'Bank. She dispensed in her parish the relief allowed by government to the poor, and such was her anxiety that it should be allotted to those most needy, that as the

excellent Curate has assured me, there is not in the extensive parish of St. Roch a single house, however wretched and filthy it may be, which was not visited by the Princess Gwendaline Borghese. On every monday she repaired to a room adjoining the parish-church, and there distributed materials for work to poor women; she paid them for their work, and afterwards sold it, (but with considerable loss) that the money might be anew distributed among the poor. "Fear not," said the worthy curate to me, "lest you should praise her too highly; be sure that whatever you may say of her will fall short of her deserts." A few days before her death she desired three Roman curates to prepare a list of those among their flocks who wanted raiment for the winter. She wished to clothe Jesus Christ, as did St. Martin, by clothing His beloved poor.

Like the sainted Queen Maud of England her only fault, if it should not rather be called a virtue, was, that she was liberal beyond her ample means. Her private fortune was entirely devoted to the poor; and for their

sake she sometimes contracted debts, which were generously paid by the Prince her husband, who admired and encouraged her benevolence.

Oh Gwendaline! we love, we revere thy memory; we weep for thy departure; we mourn because thy angelic form no longer moves among us: yet, as we fondly trust, thou art happier far than in thy earthly palace, or even amid thy beloved poor. We weep not for thee, as we should “weep for those who have no hope.” For thou art one, we presume, among the thrice happy creatures, to whom our Lord addresses those words of consolation; “Come ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for *I* was hungry and you gave me to eat, and *I* was thirsty and you gave me to drink, naked and you clothed me: sick and you visited me. Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.” Wherefore O blessed spirit, if thou art already admitted, as we humbly hope, to enjoy the inef-

fable bliss of heaven, then remember us, as well as thy afflicted family, remember also the poor thy adopted children, before the throne of God. He seems already to have heard thy prayers, for He has called thy beloved babes, ere malice could corrupt their innocence, to partake with thee of joys which the human heart cannot conceive.

And we, my Christian brethren, who still live in this place of banishment, awaiting the call of God to summon us hence, what remains for us to do? Do we envy the happiness of the Princess Gwendaline, so highly honoured by men, so richly rewarded by God? If so, we should endeavour to imitate her virtues: she was a tender mother to the orphans of the Cholera; she exhausted all her ingenuity to provide relief for them; she went from house to house to beg for them. Nor is hers the only loss which they have lately sustained. A wealthy and distinguished Duchess, not only truly pious and hospitable, but also extremely charitable to the poor, has been torn by death from her attached and illustrious

family. * It is an affecting circumstance that her last illness was occasioned by grief for the death of the Princess Gwendaline. If God have taken to Himself some of those who were most devoted to the poor, He has left their example for our imitation.

If the Romans have shewn such devotedness to a young and noble matron, whom we are proud to call our countrywoman, let us contribute liberally for the relief of their poor orphans, whose resources are now exhausted. Wherefore in the name of charity and religion, in the name of our beloved Saviour Jesus Christ, whose birth we are about to celebrate, I appeal to British generosity in their behalf: and I know well that such an appeal was never made in vain.

* The Duchess Torlonia.

Nihil Obstat
Joannes Cowie
Cens. Theol. Dep.

IMPRIMATUR
Fr. Dominicus Buttaoni
S. P. A. Mag.

IMPRIMATUR
A. Piatti Patr. Antioch.
Vicesg.



